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INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0952  
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHMFISI/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHMFISI/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
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RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU PRIORITY

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/30/2022

TAGS: MARR MOPS PTER IZ TU

SUBJECT: TURKISH MILITARY DEPLOYMENTS ON IRAQI BORDER:  
CONTINUED REINFORCEMENT AMID MEDIA HYPE

REF: A. ANKARA 1281

1B. ANKARA 1291  
1C. ANKARA 1318

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S) Summary: The Turkish military has substantial forces in the southeastern region, as reported previously, and is using those forces aggressively in counter-terrorist operations against the PKK. In this highly charged pre-election atmosphere, exacerbated by the May 22 Ankara bombing and the May 24 violation of Turkish airspace by US F-16,s, the media declares every issue a crisis, while it distorts, magnifies and invents facts to fit the latest conspiracy theory. May 31 headlines are dominated by predictions of an imminent cross border operation into Iraq, and accompanied by assertions that large numbers of tanks are pouring into the region. Our own assessment, based on observers in the area, contacts with TGS, and sensitive reporting, is that the Turkish military is continuing at a steady pace to reinforce its presence in the region (most recently with six tanks about 12 kilometers northeast of Habur) but that they are not undertaking a dramatic new build-up beyond their already substantial presence. At the same time and press hype notwithstanding, we assess that the Turks are capable of undertaking a cross border operation at any time and that such action could easily -- and immediately -- be precipitated by another PKK attack involving significant casualties. End Summary.

12. (C) Local media reports of the movement of tanks from a Turkish Army barracks in Mardin near the Syrian border towards Turkey's border with Iraq have fueled speculation about an impending Turkish cross border operation (CBO) into northern Iraq. In addition, the semi-official Anatolian News Agency reported on May 30 that th Turkish General Staff (TGS) is continuing to deploy troops along the Iraqi border, and that armored vehicles have been sent from Diyarbakir to the Iraqi border. Other less reliable local press have carried reports of varying numbers of Turkish troops, tanks and artillery moving toward the Iraq border. A Sirnak journalist told us May 31 that he had seen a significant buildup of military personnel, followed by tanks and artillery, over the past ten days in the border area east of the Habur Gate.

13. (S) According to sensitive reporting, there does not appear to be a build-up of forces on the border beyond what we have already reported. We have been able to confirm the

arrival on May 30 of six M-60 tanks at a border post 12 kms northeast of Habur Gate. Current military operations against the PKK in Sirnak Province and elsewhere in the southeast, on-going since April, could well be drawing additional armor and troops.

¶4. (S) Our Silopi Liaison Officer (LNO), currently traveling in northern Iraq, reported no unusual activity at or around the Habur Gate crossing in recent days. Nor has the LNO reported any unusual activity by a Turkish armor unit stationed near the Habur Gate.

¶5. (S) An Embassy contact at the Turkish General Staff, J-5 Plans officer Colonel Oktay Bingol, claimed to be unaware of any extraordinary deployments. He noted that counter-terrorist operations against the PKK in southeastern Turkey continue, as is routine in the spring and summer months.

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